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ABSTRACT

The central objective of language classroom instruction is learning to speak, and while the use of language for communication has a place in the classroom, it must be taught alongside other activities for which language is used. To achieve a significant level of speaking success in the classroom, the traditional syllabus must be replaced with one more compatible with the use of language for communication, but not to the exclusion of grammatical instruction. This kind of syllabus should be essentially notional and based on an inventory of semantic concepts (time, quantification, possession, modality) rather than, as traditionally, in terms of surface linguistic features. Implementation of this syllabus faces three major problems: the unavailability of notionally based grammars, the mismatch between most grammatical descriptions and the target language vernacular, and the difficulty of tapping the learners' internalized grammar. Both the more conservative norms for relatively error-free, well-formed speech and vernacular features must be included in the syllabus in the interest of communicative success and ultimate achievement of learning. (MSE)

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# CLASSROOM FL INSTRUCTION AND SYLLABUS DESIGN

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## Introduction

Recent discussions about FL instruction have been shaped by two major theoretical contributions: the application of the concept of communicative competence to classroom language instruction (Savignon 1972) and S. Krashen's Monitor theory (1981). The goals of FL instruction have been set higher to encompass the imparting of the ability to communicate in natural situations, and the ideal FL class has been defined as one in which learners negotiate meaning by means of interactive activities resembling natural communicative exchanges. The Monitor hypothesis neatly complements the extension of the concept of communicative competence to classroom FL learning by its claim that acquisition of the TL takes place only when attention is focused on the message rather than on linguistic form, as is the case in communicative interactions. The applications of some of the insights derived from these two theoretical perspectives have stimulated research on language acquisition in a classroom context and they have led to significant changes in teaching objectives. Nonetheless, because they have involved primarily extrapolation from the natural use of language in the TL community or from the acquisition of a second language under

natural conditions rather than observation of the learning of a FL under classroom conditions, their contribution to FL instruction materials and pedagogical practises has been on the whole limited.

The Monitor theory distinguished between second-language acquisition and learning. The former is a subconscious process triggered by communicative interactions proceeding according to an immutable schedule showing little variance across learners. The latter involves conscious reference to a set of formal rules. According to Krashen learning does not necessarily lead to fluent use of the TL; in fact, reference to the Monitor may be viewed as dysfunctional since it slows down the production of speech. Several aspects of the Monitor theory are questionable: 1. It is doubtful that acquisition and learning constitute two distinct sets of cognitive process and that, in particular, acquisition takes place without some reference to an abstract system of rules. W. Labov (1964) has shown that in various types of natural communicative situations native speakers refer to different sets of norms which modify the distribution and frequency variable of linguistic features. Even such natural language activities as the verbal play in which young children engage presuppose some sort of reference to linguistic principles. As Besse and Porquier (1984:77) recognize:

> ... we are constantly involved in a latent metalinguistic activity which allows us to evaluate at any moment the effect or the impact real or potential, of our [speech] productions and those of others, their

conformity or non-conformity to the norms and our mental representations of the language utilized.

2. Several studies suggest that conscious use of rules does not necessarily adversely affect the fluent use of the TL in communicative activities. Prokop, Fearon, and Rochet (1982) show that attention to linguistic form relates positively to superior performance in unstructured speech and writing and Wesche (1982) states that good learners report preference for a combination of immersion and grammar study.

3. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) point out that the learner's internalized grammar, i.e. the subconscious principles that guide acquisition of the TL, is only remotely related to linguistic descriptions. This lack of isomorphy is even more marked if one posits two different types of learning; a great distance would separate the internalized grammar that underlies acquisitional activities and the formal set of rules applied in learning tasks. Is there any wonder then if reference to the Monitor has little effect on communicative ability?

One teaching method based in part on Monitor Theory is the Natural Approach (Terrell 1977, Krashen and Terrell 1983). The Natural Approach eliminates all reference to implicity or explicity rules by having students engage in communicative activities without formal exercises focusing on linguistic form or correction of errors. As I will attempt to show this approach suffers from all the limitations of its underlying theoretical model and, in addition, fails to take into account the various factors that constrain classroom FL learning. Nonethe-

less, the absence of a formal grammatical component follows logically from its premises. This however is not the case in more popularized versions of the Natural Approach and other communicatively oriented approaches that adhere to a very traditional grammatical syllabus.

The issue of compatible syllabus design is one that has troubled communicatively-oriented approaches. Clearly a syllabus organized in terms of speech functions (types of speech acts) and situations would be most fitting for the development of communicative skills. But as one of the chief proponents of functional syllabuses admits (Wilkins 1981a, 1981b) a functional syllabus can only apply after the learners have acquired the basic grammatical structure of the TL. What is required then is a modified structural syllabus that (a) is compatible with communicative objectives and (b) recognizes the constraints imposed by the special nature of classroom FL learning. In the remarks that follow I will attempt to sketch such a syllabus.

Constraints of institutionalized language learning

Focus on the negotiation of meaning without concern for linguistic form, in other words tolerating error-laden communicative interactions is inappropriate in the classroom. The FL classroom constitutes a special language-learning and language-using context with its own sets of social conventions that are as real and valid as those of the natural use of language in the TL language community. More importantly, as N. Soule-Susbielles (1984) remarks:

... the language that is produced [in the classroom]

must be evaluated in terms of its own natural context and not according to external norms.

To focus on the question of appropriate classroom language varieties, these are determined by the attitudes of the TL community and those of the learners themselves concerning the type of language appropriate for educated foreign speakers. In a sense, TL speakers expect those who have learned their language in the classroom to speak <u>better</u> than they do, that is, to abide by the norms that define form and, often, written usage. They would ascribe low social status to foreigners who evidence gross grammatical errors who used features that they view, rightly or wrongly, as characteristic of informal conversation. For the learner, the acquisition of competence in the FL represents a sort of capital whose value increases as it approximates the prestige form of the TL (Bourdieu 1977).

Another important factor in setting appropriate pedagogical norms is teachers' competence in the TL. On the one hand, their acculturation to the TL community and their professional training lead them to refer to idealized versions of the community's prestige norms. On the other hand, they are unlikely to have sufficient experience in the natural use of the TL to approximate native speakers' ability to shift from one variety to another according to the social situations.

Finally, no matter what teaching objectives are set, explicit references to rules--grammatical, discursive, or social--cannot be excluded from the classroom. As a component of a broad education the learning of a FL cannot have its primary ob-

jective the acqusition of a communicative ability, much as that skill is desirable. Languages are not only instruments of communication; they are also means for the symbolic interpretation of the real world. FL instruction extends the learner's knowledge about language and its multi-faceted links with other human capacities and behaviors, and it must therefore include explicity discussion of linguistic principles.

The concept of pedagogical norm

The three sets of considerations mentioned above suggest that the language used in a classroom should differ from the "natural" varieties found in communicative interactions among native speakers. The differences between what may be termed a pedagogical norm and the various norms to which native speakers refer will be particularly marked at early stages of instruction when learner's speech shows many deviant features, some attributable to transfer from the native tongue, others reflecting extensive restructuring of TL input. I would suggest that a central task in organizing FL instruction is the elaboration of pedagogical norms, particularly at early stages.

A pedagogical norm, like all norms, is an abstraction. Its distinguishing feature resides in the fact that it is an artificial construct reflecting the special constraints of classroom FL learning. Four sets of principles guide the elaboration of pedagogical norms. First, they should reflect the actual behavior of TL speakers in authentic communicative situations. Second, they should conform to native speakers' idealized views of their linguistic behavior. Third, they

should match TL speakers' views about what linguistic behavior is appropriate for educated foreigners. Fourth, it should take into account learners' interlanguage features since these point the way to what is most easily learnable. It is clear that the application of the first three principles would exclude pidginized forms from a pedagogical norm.

A pedagogical norm starts from the identification of nearly synonymous grammatical features. For instance, in French futurity may be expressed by the use of a periphrastic construction (aller + the infinitive) or an inflected form: compare, je vais faire ça and je ferai ça. In the traditional French grammatical syllabus these two features are in fact presented as synonymous. The periphrastic future, viewed as easier to form, is presented first, to be replaced by the more "proper" inflected future at later stages of instruction. Recent studies bearing on vernacular forms of French--used by speakers from all social levels--suggest that the two forms are not synonymous but, on the contrary, differ semantically: the periphrastic future refers to events that will definitely occur and the simple form to those that might occur. For instance, Marie va avoir un enfant suggests that Marie is pregnant whereas Marie aura beaucoup d'enfants refers to her views about family size; it may turn out that she will be childless.

In a French course defined by pedagogical norms, the form that is easiest to use would be presented at early stages with the general meaning of futurity. At a later stage, the inflected future would be introduced and a distinction established between

definite and indefinite future. Thus, in the long term, the pedagogical norm defines behavior that more closely approximates that of TL speakers.

This last consideration underscores the fact that the concept of pedagogical norm implies a progressive presentaiton of the TL grammar proceeding by successive approximations. The selection of features reflects their centrality in natural speech acts; the order of introduction reflects the learners' internalized grammar to the extent that such a grammar can be inferred from learners' behavior. When properly applied the concept of pedagogical norm should yield a form of the TL language that shows little deviance, that enables learners to communicate within their limited means, and that provides the smoothest path toward the attainment of native-like communicative competence.

The function of grammar

The mismatch between the traditional grammatical syllabus and classroom instruction favoring communicative interactions and meaningful use of language stems mainly from its failure to distinguish among various types of grammatical features. I would like to set up a three-way distinction in grammatical features: (1) grammar as linguistic etiquette; (2) grammar as the means for the expression of deep-seated abstract semantic distinctions; (3) grammar as the means to effect stylistic manoeuver, that is, to highlight and to underscore certain parts of discourse.

Grammar as linguistic etiquette refers to the use of

obligatory features not directly related to semantic distinctions that a language requires of its speakers: gender, number, subject-verb agreement, and the like. For example, the marking of plural in English nouns is often redundant, as in six cats, a lot of shoes, many errors, where the quantifier already specifies plurality. Many of these features are redundant, yet not to use them leads to highly stigmatized speech forms. Because they are obligatory, such features as agreement and concord must be included in a syllabus following pedagogical norms. However, their presentation can sometimes be delayed by searching for nearly synonymous features that do not require obligatory grammatical marking. For example, in French the expression of possession by possessive adjectives requires gender and number agreement:

(1) mon [mo] frere, my brother vs. mon [mon] ami, my friend vs. ma [ma soeur], my sister this complex system of marking can be obviated by the temporary use of the construction noun + invariable stressed pronoun:

(2) un frere Z moi vs. un ami Z moi vs. une soeur a moi

(3) Note for example, the following alternatives in context:

C'est ton livre? Le livre, il est à toi?

Is it your book?

C'est ta règle? Cette règle, elle est à toi?

Is it your ruler?

The use of surface features for the expression of meaning constitutes the central function of grammar. As I have shown earlier in my discussion of the choice of future form in French,

the concept of pedagogical norm reduces initial difficulty by postponing the presentation of lower-level distinctions, such as definite vs. indefinite future. Where the language provides alternative means for the expression of the same semantic concept or forms expressing lower-level semantic distinctions, that alternative is presented first which can be shown to be more easily learnable. The contrasing forms and the semantic notions they express are relegated to a later state of instruction.

Grammatical features that provide for stylistic manoeuver include such devices as extra-position which permits the topicalization of themes, as for example:

(4) I want the red pencil (not the blue one). ---

It's the red pencil I want.

I don't need this kind of trouble. ---

This kind of trouble, I don't need.

The stilted nature of connected speech lacking these features is particularly striking in French textbooks which fail to provide explicit statements about left and right dislocation, often involving pronominal copies. In these constructions, the theme is extra-posed to the left or to the right of the predicate and its place in the latter occupied by a pronoun copy:

(5) J'ai beaucoup d'argent. ---De l'argent, j'<u>en</u> ai beaucoup.

Money, I have a lot of it.

Marie a des robes. ---Mary, <u>elle en</u> a des robes.

Does Mary ever have dresses!

Tu as de la veine. ---Tu <u>en</u> as, <u>toi</u>, de la veine.

You, you're lucky.

Toward a modified structural syllabus

A grammatical syllabus compatible with the imparting of some degree of communicative ability and appropriate for classroom FL learning should be essentially notional. It should be based on an inventory of semantic concepts: time (past, present, future), quantification, possession, modality (obligation, capability, etc.) rather than in terms of surface linguistic features such as the future tense, the conditional mood, the definite determiner, inversion questions, or extraposition. Whenever the TL offers an alternative the most easily learnable surface feature should be selected for the expression of a particular semantic concept. In comparison, the traditional syllabus, while it is partially notional, is designed to present a set of surface features often viewed as monolithic sets. For example, in French and Spanish textbooks the imperfect and the conditional are introduced as integral blocks rather than in terms of the various concepts they mark. For example, French textbooks portray the imperfect as the means for the expression of certain types of past states and events. They neglect o point out that it may also be used to soften commands:

(6) Si on partait ce soir. How about going out tonight!

as opposed to:

Partons ce soir! Let's leave tonight!

These textbooks are even more reductionist in their interpretation of the uses of the conditional. Generally it is presented in complex sentences where the imperfect expresses a condition

or conjecture and the conditional states the consequent result:

(7) Si j'etais fatigue, j'irais me coucher
If I were tired, I would go to bed.

In fact the conditional expresses a variety of notions:

(8) (a) Moral obligation:
Il faut partir. We have to leave.
Il faudrait partir. We should leave.

Je dois partir. I must leave.
Je devrais partir. I ought to leave.

(b) Softening commands:
Pars! Leave!
Tu pourrais partir. You might leave.

c) Conjecture:
Il est arrivé. He's arrived.
Il serait arrivé. He's probably arrived.

d) Reported but unverified fact:

La reine d'Angleterre a abdiqué
The Queen of England has abdicated.

La reine d'Angleterre aurait abdiqué.
It is reported that the Queen of England has abdicated.

In the presentation of the various semantic notions covered by the conditional, there is no need to present entire paradigms. The conditional form of the modal verbs falloir "to must", devoir "to have to", vouloir "to want", and pouvoir "to be able to" may be taught as individual lexical items, as it were.

The implementation of the proposed syllabus faces three major problems. The first stems from the general unavailability of notional based grammars; a notable exception is The Grammar of Contemporary English by R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, and J. Svartvik (London: Longman, 1972). The second problem is the mismatch between most grammatical descriptions of the TL vernacular, the types of speech used for everyday communication between speakers belonging to the same social groups. Gram-

matical descriptions based on traditional, structural or generative-transformation theories account for a very narrow range of TL speech, that reflecting the formal speech of prestige speakers. In fact often these descriptions are based on a highly idealized view of the TL more representative of written texts than spoken usage.

The third problem involves the difficulty of tapping the learners' internalized grammar or, to state it somewhat differently, the principles which guide their approximations to the TL. Until we identify these principles, we can only operate in a haphazard way on the basis of random observations of learners' errors which provide some insight on the underlying principles. Yet there are two other types of data that provide convergent evidence for these principles: pidginized or creolized version of languages and child language.

In his provocative book, the Roots of Language, the creolist Derek Bickerton (1981) uses striking convergences between features found in creole languages (the products of pidginization) and the language of young children to argue that both types of languages reflect species specific linguistic universals. For Bickerton creole languages and child language provide direct access to both the underlying semantic concepts of human language and the optimal--that is, most easily learnable--expression of these concepts with surface linguistic structures. For example, most European-based creoles evidence the distinction between definiteness and non-definiteness in future events: and corresponding to the inflected verbs of

their source language they use periphrasting constructions for the expression of tense:

| Spanish | Papiamentu | |
|---|---|---|
| canto | mi ta canta | I'm singing |
| cantan | nan ta canta | they're singing |
| cantamos | nos ta canta | we're singing |
| cante | mi a canta | I sang |
| cantaba | mi tabata canta | I was singing |
| cantare | lo mi canta | I'll sing |
| cantaria | lo mi a canta | I would sing |

In the case of the choice between periphrastic and the inflected future in French, creole languages would provide an a priori basis for the selection of the former as the structure to be presented first for the expression of futurity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one may communicate without respecting the linguistic etiquette of the TL community, but one would be at great risk when doing this in speaking. The central objective of classroom FL instruction is learning to speak not learning to communicate. For sure, the use of language for communication does have a rightful place in the classroom but along with other activities for which language is used. To forget about this crucial difference between communicating and speaking is to reduce the educational value of FL instruction and to jeopardize its role in the curriculum.

In this presentation, I have attempted to show that if a significant level of success in speaking can be attained in the classroom, we must replace the traditional syllabus with one that is more compatible with the use of language for communica-

tion. On the one hand, sociolinguistic considerations favor reference to more conservative TL norms while also requiring the use of relatively error free well-formed speech. On the other hand, features considered "incorrect" or ascribed low social status must also be included in the interest of communicative success and ultimate achievement of learning.

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